

Message Text

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PAGE 01 SAN JO 01862 091421Z

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FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 134

S E C R E T SAN JOSE 1862

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E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PINS, CS

SUBJECT: FIGUERES FAVORS INTERRUPTION OF DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

REF: SAN JOSE 1745

1. DURING LONG PRIVATE CONVERSATION WITH ME MAY 7, FORMER PRESIDENT FIGUERES SPOKE AT LENGTH OF HIS VIEWS VERY MUCH ALONG LINES OF THOSE ATTRIBUTED TO HIM BY PRESIDENT ODUBER AS REPORTED REFTEL.

2. FIGUERES FELT THAT SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT IN COSTA RICA HAD DETERIORATED INTO LIBERTARIANISM AND WAS NO LONGER FUNCTIONING. HE INSISTED THAT IMPROVEMENTS COULD NOT BE MADE IN THE SYSTEM BECAUSE OF THE ABILITY OF THE LEGISLATURE TO BLOCK ANY SIGNIFICANT REFORMS. HE STATED THAT IT MAY, THEREFORE, BE NECESSARY TO INTERRUPT THE PRESENT GOVERNMENTAL PROCESSES FOR ABOUT A YEAR, INSTALL A SMALL GROUP TO RUN THE COUNTRY, WHILE A NEW CONSTITUTION WAS BEING DRAFTED AND APPROVED, AND THEN TURN THE GOVERNMENT BACK OVER TO DULY ELECTED AUTHORITIES. FIGUERES SAID PROBLEM WITH PRESENT SYSTEM IS THAT EXECUTIVE DOES NOT HAVE ENOUGH POWER WHILE LEGISLATURE IS IN POSITION TO BLOCK WHATEVER MEANINGFUL ACTIONS EXECUTIVE MIGHT WISH TO UNDERTAKE. FIGURES SAID CONGRESS ABLE TO BLOCK EVEN SUCH REASONABLE PROPOSALS AS SETTLING A SMALL NUMBER OF FAMILIES ON LAND AND HELPING THEM TO MAKE IT PRODUCTIVE, OR BUILDING SOME FOUR-STORY APARTMENT COMPLEXES TO HOUSE THE URBAN DWELLERS WHO ARE NOW LIVING IN SLUMS. IT ALSO PREVENTS

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PAGE 02 SAN JO 01862 091421Z

ABOLITION OF COMMUNIST-INFESTED LAND REFORM AGENCY ITCO AND

INEFFECTIVE NATIONAL PRODUCTION COUNCIL. IN CIRCUMSTANCES,
ONLY ANSWER IS TO GET RID OF LEGISLATURE AND START OVER.

3. I TOLD FIGUERES I HAD NO DESIRE, OF COURSE, TO INTERFERE
IN ANY WAY IN COSTA RICAN AFFAIRS, BUT I WONDERED IF CONSTITU-
TIONAL AMENDMENTS COULD NOT BE MADE WITHOUT INTERRUPTING THE
EXISTING DEMOCRATIC PROCESS AND MACHINERY. FIGUERES SAID THAT
LEGISLATURE WHICH HAS BEEN ABLE TO BLOCK OTHER EFFECTIVE ACTIONS
WOULD BE ABLE TO PREVENT THIS FROM HAPPENING ALSO.

4. I WONDERED ALSO WHETHER ANY ATTEMPT TO INTERRUPT THE
FUNCTIONING OF THE SYSTEM NOW WOULD NOT BE LIKELY TO LEAD TO
VIOLENCE AND BLOODSHED FAR BEYOND ANYTHING THAT HAD OCCURRED
IN 1948. FIGUERES SAID THAT EVEN THE PROPERTIED GROUP WOULD
BE WILLING TO ACCEPT SOME CHANGES NOW BEFORE THE DRIFT CONTINUES
TOO FAR TOWARDS THE LEFT WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF WORSE CONSE-
QUENCES FOR THEM. I ASKED FIGUERES WHAT WERE ODUBER'S VIEWS
ON THIS MATTER. HE REPLIED THAT SOMETIME AGO ODUBER HAD
SPOKEN OF THE NEED FOR CHANGES TO BE MADE IN THE CONSTITUTION.
I TOLD FIGUERES THAT COSTA RICA WAS ADMIRER INTERNATIONALLY
FOR ITS PROVE-
ABILITY TO ADHERE TO DEMOCRACY AND TO MAKE CHANGES
WITHIN THE SYSTEM. IT WOULD BE UNFORTUNATE IF THIS VIRTUE OF
COSTA RICA SHOULD BE LOST.

5. AFTER NOTING MY DOUBTS AND RESERVATIONS ABOUT THE IDEA,
FIGUERES BACKED AWAY A BIT. HE SAID, "WELL, IF THE INTERRUPTION
DOES NOT COME NOW THEN, IF THINGS DO NOT IMPROVE, IT MIGHT HAVE
TO HAPPEN AT THE END OF ODUBER'S TERM OR RIGHT AFTER THAT." HE
REPEATED THE ASSURANCE THAT CHANGE WOULD ONLY BE MADE IN THE
INTEREST OF STRENGTHENING THE PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRACY AND PRIVATE
ENTERPRISE IN WHICH HE BELIEVED.

6. INTERESTINGLY ENOUGH, EARLIER IN THE CONVERSATION FIGUERES
SPOKE OF HIS ADMIRATION FOR THE EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF
THE SYSTEM IN ROMANIA, WHICH, HE SAID, PERMITS DISCUSSION OF
ISSUES ON THE LOWER LEVEL BUT WHICH ALLOWS CAPABLE PEOPLE TO MAKE
FINAL DECISIONS ON MAJOR ISSUES IN THE INTEREST OF THE COUNTRY.

7. FROM THE DISCUSSIONS IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT FIGURES HAS GIVEN
SECRET

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PAGE 03 SAN JO 01862 091421Z

LONG AND SERIOUS THOUGHT TO THESE MATTERS AND UNDOUBTEDLY HAS
BEEN DISCUSSING THEM WITH OTHERS, AS ODUBER ALLEGED (REFTEL).
I AM UNDER NO ILLUSIONS THAT MY TALK WITH FIGUERES WILL KEEP
HIM FROM CARRYING OUT WHATEVER ACTIONS HE HAS IN MIND, BUT THE
RESERVATIONS EXPRESSED DID SEEM TO GIVE HIM SOME PAUSE FOR
REFLECTION. IT IS CLEAR, HOWEVER, THAT SITUATION IS TRULY
UNSETTLED AND COULD BE UPSET AT ANY TIME.
TODMAN

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